

Six in the city

Meet six people whose efforts help make Boston a better place

The Boston Globe

January 1, 2007

We ring in the new year with news from the Corporation for National and Community Service that adults in America are volunteering at the highest rate -- 27 percent -- in three decades. And today is a day when many of us resolve to do things to improve ourselves and the world around us. Meet six people whose efforts help make Boston a better place.

Karen Kiefer

Karen Kiefer grew up baking Irish soda bread with her mother. When she had four daughters of her own, she passed along the tradition to them. "My mother grew up in Dorchester in a large Irish Catholic family where the currency of the day was bread: feeding the heart and filling the stomach," says Kiefer, who now lives in Wayland.

Then came the terror of 9/11, and Kiefer and her friend Juliette Fay were anxious to do something, anything, to help. They began by baking loaves of bread for firefighters and police officers, getting their children and neighbors involved. But why stop there? Why not expand their project into a nonprofit that would provide bread to the down and out?

Five years later, Spread the Bread has baked and delivered tens of thousands of loaves: banana, cranberry, lemon, whole wheat, challah, bread with nuts and without, in all different shapes and sizes. Each loaf is creatively wrapped with a homemade tag bearing a message from a child. Recipients include veterans and soldiers, shelters, food banks and pantries, Meals on Wheels, Councils on Aging -- anyone in need, says Kiefer, of "bread philanthropy." The organization also collects bread and pastries from corporate donors such as Starbucks, Iggy's, and Panera, and distributes them to shelters. On a Saturday morning before Christmas, Kiefer and her daughter Emma, dressed as an elf, dropped off several gingerbread houses -- made by Girl Scouts -- to Rosie's Place for homeless women in the South End. They had several other stops to make, including St. Francis House.

An important part of Spread the Bread is involving young people in the baking and delivering. "We want the kids to learn how simple it is to make a difference," Kiefer says. Spread the Bread now has a chapter at Boston College, where both Kiefer and Fay got their degrees. This season, some 1,200 students and faculty answered the call and baked. "It was the Jesuits who changed my paradigm from thinking about my own kitchen to thinking about the world," says Kiefer.

The word on Spread the Bread is spreading. Last spring it was among 10 groups nationwide recognized on National Make a Difference Day, winning \$10,000 from the Paul Newman Foundation. Last Halloween, Spread the Bread hosted its first SandWitch-a-thon, a sandwich drive to benefit shelters and food banks. And Kiefer is planning a Spread the Bread Youth Philanthropy Conference this spring to teach families how they can make a difference in their communities.

"One of the things I'm most proud of," Kiefer says, "is that this initiative has taught thousands of people, young and old, that they can make a profound difference in a simple way."

BELLA ENGLISH